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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 002187

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2018

TAGS: KWBG PHUM ASEC IS PBTS PTER

SUBJECT: ESCALATING SETTLER VIOLENCE IN HEBRON AS IDF  
PREPARES TO EVACUATE RAJABI COMPOUND

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The IDF declared the area surrounding the Rajabi compound a "closed military zone" on December 2, and deployed four Border Police companies to Hebron. Violence instigated by settlers injured at least 20 Palestinians as well as some Israeli security personnel, according to international contacts in Hebron and media report. Settler contacts predicted that the Rajabi compound could be evacuated soon. End summary.

SETTLER YOUTH ATTACK PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELI SECURITY FORCES

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¶2. (C) International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Hebron Delegate Catherine Plumridge told Poloff on December 3 that around 20 Palestinians have been hospitalized over the past two days for injuries from settler violence. She said three boys were ambushed and badly beaten, one woman was hit with a tear gas cannister, four men were attacked and bitten by settlers' dogs, and a seven-month-old baby suffered from inhalation of tear gas fired by the IDF. Press reports said 18 Israeli security forces personnel and settlers had been injured on December 2. Plumridge said Palestinians in Hebron describe the situation as the "worst ever." She said she met with the local head of the Civil Administration December 2, because the system designed to allow ICRC ambulances access to the area is "not working."

¶3. (C) UNOCHA southern field worker Hamad Qawasneh told Poloff December 2 that settlers had attempted to burn three Palestinian houses that day. Many Palestinians near the Rajabi compound, especially the elderly and pregnant women, are suffering from "nervous breakdowns" and fear additional settler attacks, he said. Qawasneh added, "some people fear there will be a massacre."

BORDER POLICE ARE "THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT PLACE"

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¶4. (C) Plumridge said December 3 that around 150 Border Policemen are now deployed around the Rajabi compound, calling them "the right people in the right place with the right orders and the will to carry them out." She said this is a "turning point" in the situation, because the GOI is "taking measures that are more effective." She said, for example, that Border Police on December 3 caught and detained three settlers from Kiryat Arba who were trying to enter a Palestinian area; Plumridge called this level of vigilance "unprecedented." (Note: Plumridge said there are currently 150 people in the Rajabi compound. End note.)

MIXED PREDICTIONS FROM SETTLERS  
ON THE TIMING OF THE OPERATION

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¶5. (C) David Wilder, spokesman for the Hebron settlers,

told Poloff December 2 that "we're trying very hard to keep this under control," and that "Barak is not interested in the massive and explosive violence" that would occur if the evacuation is attempted. Asked if the operation is imminent, Wilder said, "logic and rationale don't apply here." Wilder told Poloff that "the Yesha does not represent us; we didn't ask them to help and are not obligated by anything they do or say." Head of the Yesha Rabbinical Council and radical Kiryat Arba rabbi Dov Lior issued a December 3 statement: "The injustice is shouting up to the high heavens... (I) call upon all to immediately come to Beit Hashalom in Hebron to protect and defend the house and the honor of the People of Israel and the Land of Israel."

¶6. (C) Elkana settler Mel Borenstein told Poloffs December 3 that he believes a Rajabi compound evacuation would happen that night. He said several Elkana settlers went to Hebron in support of the Rajabi compound, but departed quickly because of the surrounding chaos. "Nobody is in charge, and the kids are running wild," he said. Mayor of Ariel settlement Ron Nachman told Poloffs that the probable evacuation of the Rajabi compound foreshadows future settlement evacuations, and the damage the settlers will consequently cause. Nachman warned against any attempt to evacuate Ariel, saying that Rajabi compound is "the ant, and we are the elephant."

WALLES